

3- Why do we need freedom of speech?

The traditional defence of free speech in our culture, i think, is much too feeble. It comes from John Stuart Mill and it is essentially a utilitarian defence: that we're all better off and happier if there's freedom of speech. I think that's much too feeble. I think it's a basic human right and it's a basic human right precisely because we are speech act performing animals; it's like a right to move your body around. And so the question, "Why should we have free speech?" is not answered by saying, "Well, society is better off if we have free speech than if we don't have free speech." Because that means, in a situation where society isn't better off, it looks like we'd be justified in restricting free speech. I think, in fact, the justification for free speech has to do with us – and I should write something about this; I never have – but it has to do with us as speech act performing animals. It seems to me, it's a basic feature of us as biological human beings, as beasts of a certain kind, that we've got this capacity to talk. And I think a restriction of that is like a restriction of any other human capacity: it's a violation of a basic right.

John Searle « Philosophy now »(1932-)

Biography

John Searle, (born 1932-), American philosopher best known for his work in the philosophy of language especially speech act theory and the philosophy of mind. He also made significant contributions to epistemology, ontology, the philosophy of social institutions, and the study of practical reason. He viewed his writings in these areas as forming a single picture of human experience and of the social universe in which that experience takes place.

In large part, Searle was driven to the study of mind by his study of language. As indicated above, his analysis of speech acts always involved reference to mental concepts. Since mental states are essentially involved in issuing speech acts, Searle realized that his analysis of language could not be complete unless it included a clear understanding of those states.

Problematic

Why should we have free speech? To feel better and happier: individual and society, as the utilitarians believe it, or it is a fundamental right that can not be restricted?

Position of the author

According to the text of John Searle, language according to the opinion of utilitarians like John Stewart Mill, does not really have any exact and fundamental meaning, because it is not only a sign of happiness but more only that. Language gives humanity its true meaning, separating it from animals, it forms an inalienable right. And for this reason, the right of expression must be guaranteed.

Text comment

John Searle comes out of the analytic tradition so he is influenced by his followers as Frege, G.E. Moore, Wittgenstein, Gilbert Ryle, J.L. Austin, Paul Grice, P.F. Strawson.

Le courant analytique, dans lequel Searle se situe, est pour une large part, un ensemble de réactions à l'œuvre de Gottlob Frege. Il ne faisait que commencer à prendre la mesure de 'importance considérable de Frege, non seulement pour ce qui de ses propres théories, mais aussi des directions de recherches qu'il a fourni

à Russell, à Wittgenstein, et à Austin, qui fut son professeur à Oxford. Donc, en un sens, il appartient à la révolution frégéenne.